HOW TO DESIGN A NEXT GENERATION PROGRAM

Meeting the Needs of Today's Families

The Millennial generation is nearly all grown up, and many are now the parents of the kids that make up Generation Z. Born from the mid-1990s into the recent 2000s, members of Gen Z are currently moving into their tween and teen years.

Incorporating these two key generations, today's digital-native families have different ideals than Generation X or the Baby Boomers, especially when it comes to programming for camps and after-school programs.

Is your program still offering what it did in decades past? Traditional programs and schedules were effective in their time—but now, times are changing.

Camarin Wanamaker, Digital Marketing Consultant, knows a thing or two about creating a next generation program.

With more than ten years' experience working with camps and classes at ACTIVE Network, she recommends that the first step is to create an open dialogue and listen to what families want.

Says Wanamaker, "When doing customer research, there really is no substitute for having frequent conversations, particularly with kids."

Pair your conversation-driven intel with the information in this whitepaper to create a customized next generation program. We'll explore:

+ Flexibility: Program Formats, Session Lengths, Payment Options

+ Delivering Results: Maximizing Downtime, Measuring Achievement, Building Life & Career Skills

FLEXIBILITY IS KEY

In this digital era, the family day is always in flux, and your programs need to keep up. You can no longer depend on the historical traditional family schedule to set your sessions.

Parents now look for programs that align not only with their children's interests, but also with the family's unique logistics. According to our research, 60% of parents say that "fits within schedule" is their biggest concern when choosing a program, followed by budget, and location.

Here are a few ways to add flexibility to your programming:

+ Shift to shorter sessions

+ Offer a variety of session lengths

+ Expand to more sites and locations

+ Offer make-up sessions

In addition to flexibility in the program schedule itself, payment flexibility gives parents more choices. Consider a "pay per class" option so that families don't feel locked into a long program, and kids can sample various classes, if desired. Another great idea is to build connections with scholarship sponsors or establish financial assistance programs to help parents foot the bill.

When it comes to transportation, employing strategies to ease transportation costs and streamline logistics is another way organizers can provide flexibility to families. Suggest carpooling, so that parents can cut down on fuel costs. For out-of-town participants or in the case of sick days or other situations that may stand in the way of a child's in-person attendance, virtual attendance via Skype or Google Hangouts is a helpful Plan B.

Always get feedback from participants and parents on the options you've offered, and adapt your program based on how they respond.

"When we survey program directors, we find that very few are polling their customers or collecting testimonials, and even fewer are conducting focus group research." Wanamaker says. "Be sure to add a quantitative component to your consumer research, and use tools like surveys to ask about interests and challenges in addition to program feedback."

An overall attitude of flexibility is the best way to ensure your program is agile enough to keep up with the modern family.

51%
of parents enroll their kids in 3+ extra-curricular activities per year

84%
of parents want programs on a weekly schedule

DELIVER TANGIBLE RESULTS

Another must-have component of a next generation program is the ability to deliver measurable, actionable results. While fun is still a big part of the picture, forward-thinking camps and after-school programs offer a whole lot more.

Today's youth takes a far more professional approach to free time, thanks to the ever-looming college application process. This means turning downtime into uptime. Camps and classes can create levels of achievement within activities, so that kids can show what they've accomplished. It's a great idea to provide the credentials of program leaders, as well, so that parents and kids can see the quality of the program reflected in your leadership.

Parents are also looking for programs that build skills that might not be taught in school. Both hard and soft skills are necessary to catapult kids' learning to the next level as they prepare to enter an ever-evolving job market. Top areas of interest include coding, financial literacy, shop skills, college planning and community service.

Furthermore, parents recognize that excessive screen time can have a negative effect on their children's lives. They want to make sure kids are engaging in activities that stimulate their minds while giving them much-needed exercise. In fact, 45% of parents want kids to spend more time on physical play instead of digital, with 47% desiring an equal balance of active time and screen time.

"Like adults, kids can also find technology and the 24-hour news cycle exhausting," Wanamaker says. The antidote? Design programs that take kids out of the superficial, pop culture-filled world of their screens and into something with more depth.

Be prepared to communicate the benefits and life skills your programs provide. Support your programming selections with statistics from recognized sources, and if you can provide any sort of national or organizational accreditation upon completion, kids and parents will be more likely to view your program as a good investment. And once again, listen to feedback and adapt to the evolving interests of your enrollees.

Popular Skill-Building Program Topics

- Home Economics
- Technology
- Shop
- Art
- Coding
- Tinkering
- STEM
- Health & Wellness
- Community Service
- College Planning
- Nature/Environment
- Financial Literacy

CONCLUSION

The most important part of creating a next generation program is listening to the desires of the modern family and adapting your programs to match. Design formats that provide parents with options, versatility and measurable results. Also, focus on helping build valuable life skills while offering enriching alternatives to excessive screen time.

ACTIVE's Camp & Class Manager makes it easier than ever to keep up with the wants and needs of modern families, from flexible program booking for customized session options to integrated email marketing tools, text messaging and social media tools to help you keep in touch with your customers.

It's time for a next generation solution.

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